

Anderson Ready for Battle With Government, but Appears Unlikely to Get One

A 'Low-Key' U.S. Inquiry On Disclosures Foreseen

By JACK ROSENTHAL

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 5—The columnist Jack Anderson said today that he was ready, if necessary, for a battle with the Government over his disclosure of secret India-Pakistan papers, but he appeared unlikely to get it.

The Justice Department conceded that the matter was under investigation but would say no more. And officials of three agencies, speaking privately, left the impression that the Administration regarded the disclosures more as an embarrassment than as a damaging security breach.

One official said that "measured, low-key analysis" might even be a more accurate description than the word "investigation," in contrast to prior extensive inquiries by the Justice Department into security leaks.

It is widely felt that these have often been undertaken more for deterrent effect than out of real hope of discovering reporters' sources. But this time an official said: "There's no banging of cymbals. Right now, we're assessing where we are."

Reflecting the same relative calm, senior Pentagon sources said the disclosures primarily affected diplomatic sensitivity rather than military security.

Lower-Level Source Seen

And some officials, noting that as many as 25 persons in the Pentagon alone had access to the documents, which dealt with United States policy toward the Indian-Pakistani conflict, expressed belief that Mr. Anderson's source was not a trusted senior official but possibly a junior assistant.

This was at odds with Mr. Anderson's view, expressed in an interview today. "My sources—and they are plural—are some of their own boys," he said. "And if they want to finger them, they're going to wind up with bubble gum all over their faces."

"These sources are the Ellsbergs who left the Government two years ago," he continued,

referring to Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defense Department official indicted for his role in the Pentagon papers case. In fact, Mr. Anderson said, the flow of documents to him is continuing.

Today, his office distributed copies of three of the documents, secret internal accounts of White House strategy sessions during the Indian-Pakistani war, to 17 newspapers, the Associated Press and United Press International.

The impression of apparent Government calm appeared to differ from the reaction Mr. Anderson said he had experienced. "I've had no overt, direct threats," he said, but he told of receiving telephone calls from two officials, also friends, saying that he risked being indicted.

"And there are more subtle, sophisticated pressures you learn to sense," the columnist said.

He said he understood that the Federal investigation of the disclosures was being coordinated by Robert C. Mardian, head of the Justice Department's Internal Security Division.

"If Mr. Mardian is going to investigate me, I guess I should investigate him," Mr. Anderson declared. "I expect I'll find out more about him than he will on me. I don't think the Government has as much right to investigate reporters as they do to investigate the Government."

In any event, he added, he is sure no investigation can uncover his sources—"unless the sources themselves are careless." He said no previous investigation, including one last summer that reached the grand jury stage, had succeeded in doing so. The investigation last summer concerned an article Mr. Anderson had written about plans for bombing in Vietnam.

The view within the Government that the disclosures were being squared with Mr. Anderson's own assessment.

"When I first starting getting them," he said, "I felt very strongly that these documents should not have been classified 'secret,' but 'censored.' The security stamp is being used as promiscuously as a stapling machine."

Mr. Anderson has presided over Washington Merry-Go-Round, a Washington exposé column with more than 700 newspaper subscribers, since the death in 1969 of Drew Pearson, its founder. Five other reporters work for Mr. Anderson, but it was he himself who obtained the documents in the current controversy.

Through its 35-year history, the column has developed a reputation for pursuing tips and leads from Government employees, often anonymous.

Mr. Anderson today offered the following guarded chronology of how he had obtained the current set of documents.

"During the India-Pakistan war, one of my sources told me we were bungling. Here was a conflict between a military dictatorship and the world's second largest democracy, and whose side did we—the largest democracy—come out on? The dictatorship."

His sources became even more troubled, he recounted, when American warships were sent into the Bay of Bengal. They feared that the Soviet Union might react. "It sounded like another Gulf of Tonkin situation, but much hairier," Mr. Anderson said.

Documentation Requested

He said he had persuaded his sources that if they wanted him to write about their fears he would have to have access to documents to authenticate his reports.

"They gave me a dozen representative documents," Mr. Anderson said. But he insisted that he could not rely only on selected papers, he explained.

"In time, they let me see a whole massive file of documents," he said. "Then I, not ultimately, he used secret passages in a total of seven ar-

ticles prior to releasing the full documents to other newspapers, he said.

At first, he declared, he was "cautious, even timid." The fighting was still going on and he had determined that he would print no military secrets, he declared.

It became evident to him, he went on, that there were no military secrets involved, only potential embarrassment.

"And if something is classified 'Secret' just because it could be embarrassing, then secrecy no longer means anything," he asserted. "I said to my staff, 'Let's publish all we can get until the Government adopts a sensible policy on classification.'"